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ABSTRACT

Micronesia is a multicultural society which must develop an educational system to meet viable cultural options. The society harmoniously blends Spanish, Oriental, German, and American influences in its language, racial structure, religion, and architecture, but not in its educational system. Education has traditionally been tailored to the needs of the political or religious authority in power rather than to an intercultural commitment. Education for self-identity will have to make accommodations with the contradictory contributions of past administering authorities as well as foster respect for indigenous institutions. A present shortcoming of both the formal and nonformal educational systems is the stereotyping of various minority cultures. To combat this problem, Micronesian schools should stress curriculum which incorporates material on outer islanders, placing particular emphasis on biographies of Micronesians who have achieved stature. On the nonformal level, wider exposure of museum collections, applications for grants for cultural preservation, and emphasis on the relevance of historical Micronesian sites can encourage cultural pluralism. Micronesia has always been a multicultural society, and education must awaken to this fact and contribute to the building of a new social order. (Author/DB)

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EDUCATION FOR MORE THAN ONE CULTURE: FOSTERING CULTURAL PLURALISM IN MICRONESIA

by
Donald F. Smith

In terms of Micronesian society, the whole has always been greater than the sum of its parts. It has been a multi-cultural society since its early contacts with both Occidental and Oriental cultures. Since the 16th century and even before, the island world has known a succession of invaders. Spain's rule from the 16th to the 19th century was terminated with the Spanish-American War, after which Germany occupied the islands. Japanese naval forces appeared in 1914 and ruled Micronesia until World War II when the American period began. Each of these nations left its mark in language, racial structure, religion, and architecture. Even today, Micronesia's informal education continues on many levels with western and Oriental cultures on the periphery.¹ However, until recently, this cultural pluralism and persistence of antecedent cultural traditions has been allowed to lie dormant or has been ignored. Except for a few pioneer educators,² Micronesian and American education have failed in most areas of the curriculum to realize the implications and even the advantages of this condition.

It is this speaker's premise that the Micronesian educational system in the future must accentuate viable cultural options for the children of the island world. Through both formal and informal institutions, students must be equipped to operate not only in more than one language but also in more than one culture. Margaret Mead, in her work of over a half-century ago,

¹ Naval squadrons from western nations such as Australia and New Zealand visit the region periodically. Korean and Filipino workers interact with Micronesians in the construction trades. Poaching by fishermen from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan offers another dimension of cultural contact, albeit on a negative scale involving violation of international waters.

² Margaret Hill

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explicitly stated the reasons for such options. The island people might be educated for "world mobility"³ in one generation, or they might be educated to become "world mobile" over several generations.⁴ Only through such eclecticism on the part of the Micronesian educational system will Micronesia have the opportunity at this stage in its development to fulfill George S. Counts's challenge to the schools to build a new social order.⁵ For those who belong to tricultural backgrounds (i.e., Micronesian, Oriental, and Occidental) emphasis must be placed on belonging to all three, appreciating each, and finding that belonging to such tripartite cultures will be more rewarding than belonging to one.

It is important for every child to have an appreciation of his group's cultural heritage. This strengthens his self-image and provides him with an intrinsic motivation to achieve. It also encourages him to appreciate his culture and contributions of other groups. Yet glimpses of the past indicate that colonial powers, including the United States, have not recognized the cultural diversity present in Micronesia. Spanish educational efforts in the Mariana Islands spearheaded by the Jesuits indicate little understanding and appreciation for the indigenous culture. Mainly concerned with Christianizing and proselytizing, they thrust Christian concepts upon the Chamorros of the Marianas. "It was a planned and ruthless destruction of a people who would not . . . drop their traditional language and customs . . . all these elements

³World mobility refers to the acquisition by the islanders of values, skills, and technology that will enable them to reasonably adapt to new environments and surroundings. This would not only mean ability to use a world language, such as English, but would permit electives between the various cultures.

⁴Margaret Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa (New York: New American Library, 1949).

⁵George S. Counts, Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order? (New York: John Day Company, 1932).

they must replace with Spanish customs."⁶ As time went on, the Chamorro culture was obliterated,⁷ with the people replacing their daily pattern of living with elements of a European culture. Considering the length of time Spain occupied the islands, its legacy and devotion to cultural pluralism is not a proud one. While little evidence of the ancient Chamorro culture exists today, other than archeological remains, the Spanish presence is pervasive in the language, architecture, food, and customs of the Marianas people.

Despite its short interlude in the islands, Germany's educational policies made few intrusions and inroads into the various Micronesian societies. Following a laissez-faire policy, German government efforts were meager with minimal investments, thus leaving education in the hands of German Capuchin missionaries who replaced the Spanish padres. Evidence of the German presence is not completely lacking, however, with their missionaries still active at the local level in the islands.⁸

While education under the Japanese was an important factor in the daily lives of the Micronesians, there was little concern or respect for maintaining the various cultures side by side with the Japanese. The Micronesian educational system established by the Japanese was designed "to civilize the natives and make them into loyal and economically useful citizens of the Japanese Empire."⁹ The curriculum also indicated a concern for meeting the needs of Japanese society

⁶Elizabeth Antilla, "A History of the People of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and Their Education," (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, 1965), p. 92.

⁷The destructiveness of the Spanish educational policy was reflected in the disappearance of the matrilineal system as well as the loss of the art of boatbuilding and navigation skills so essential to an island people.

⁸Liebenzell Mission.

⁹J. L. Fisher, "Japanese Schools for the Natives of Truk, Caroline Islands," Human Organization, XXX (Summer 1961), p. 8.

rather than respect for indigenous patterns. In reports of the League of Nations Mandate Commission, concern was voiced that "the curriculum showed that half the school program was devoted to the study of the Japanese language."¹⁰ In 1930, Mlle. Donnerrigg of the Commission observed that texts used for Micronesians contained material on Japanese history and institutions and wondered whether this was appropriate for the natives. The Japanese representative in replying indicated "Japan could hardly be expected to foster in her mandate the institutions of European or American powers."¹¹ From these glimpses, it is obvious the administering authority did not look favorably upon suggestions or recommendations that a more balanced view of Micronesian institutions and previous foreign powers would be in the best interest of the island people.

American efforts in education may be traced to the mid-19th century when Protestant missionaries reached the Marshall and Eastern Caroline Islands. Like the Spanish, the legacy of the Boston Mission is not one that fostered respect for Micronesian patterns of life.¹² Primarily interested in Protestantizing the population, they depreciated and denigrated behavior they considered un-Christian. Many of their teachings were destructive of the core values in the island societies. Practices such as polygamy, premarital sex, dancing, and clothing styles were denounced. Micronesians were to become Christians and pattern their lives after western behavior.

Since the inception of the American period after World War II, evidence indicates that from time to time efforts were made by the administering authority and other individuals to preserve the indigenous cultures. Admiral Wright, the first deputy high commissioner of the islands, stated that the administration

¹⁰ League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission, Minutes of the Tenth Session, November 4-19, 1926 (Geneva: League of Nations, 1926), p. 76.

¹¹ "Japanese Government, Annual Report of the Administration of the South Seas Islands Under Japanese Mandate for the Year 1926 (Japan Government, 1926), p. 264.

¹² American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

policy should "provide schools with local teachers trained not to impose an alien culture upon their charges."¹³ The Naval administration in 1947, recognizing its limitations in this area, went a step further in seeking advice of experienced educators, and set up the Advisory Committee on Education for Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Consisting of eighteen civilian educators, the Committee made many recommendations. The most interesting was a concern for social adaptation, "encouragement of self-respect for past achievements and prevailing social practices through the use of indigenous traditions and arts as curriculum material."¹⁴ It is unfortunate that difficulties ensued between the Advisory Committee and the Navy which led to a phasing out of its efforts.

During the decade of the fifties, individual educators responded to the challenge with infrequent curriculum materials developed at the local level. The reasons for this development are best stated in Yap Our Islands. The purpose of the book was "a growing need to better understand, evaluate and preserve Yapese culture."¹⁵ Unfortunately, material of this sort was few and far between depending upon the individual teacher's commitment to an intercultural dimension.

Three Issues in Fostering Cultural Pluralism: Intra and Intercultural Dimensions

The future of Micronesia will depend to a large degree on how well the formal and informal educational system fosters a respect for a new identity. Education for self-identity will have to make accommodations with the contra-

¹³C. H. Wright, "Let's Not Civilize These Happy People," Saturday Evening Post, CCXIX (May 3, 1947), 150.

¹⁴Dorothy E. Richard, U. S. Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Vol. III (Washington: Office of Chief of Naval Operations, 1957), p. 960.

¹⁵Yap Our Islands by the Ninth Grade Intermediate School, 1955-1956 (Yap District Department of Education (February 1956)). This is merely one example of many different types of curriculum material prepared by various teachers and their students which, in their opinions, truly reflect their culture. Unfortunately, many of these early materials have been lost to posterity due to lack of care.

dictory contributions of past administering authorities as well as foster respect for indigenous institutions. Whatever the strategies and steps taken to develop a multicultural curriculum, the issues should generate controversy among Micronesians as they re-examine the shortcomings of the present education programs. The schools must insure that a balance of all ethnic group contributions blend well in the curriculum. Three of the issues that Micronesian and American educators might address themselves to are stereotyping, self-concept, and religion.

A shortcoming of both the formal and informal educational system which passes unchallenged is the present stereotyping of the various minority cultures in the Micronesian setting. Particularly disquieting is the omission of the strengths and cultural contributions that the outer islanders impart to the total Micronesian culture. Micronesians in the district centers have widely-held misconceptions regarding outer islanders. How many times have I heard residents in the urban centers describe the outer islanders with statements such as "they dress differently," "they speak differently." Such stereotyping carries over and is reinforced in daily life where outer islanders are considered less desirable workers and idlers in comparison with center residents. Consequently, such stereotyping places them in a minority position making it difficult for them to find employment in the centers. This lack of acceptance can be found also in housing, where they are accused of living in less desirable or slum areas and being clanish. Yet, this is due to the fact they are considered outsiders and find it difficult to secure adequate housing at reasonable rates elsewhere. Once in the district center, outer islanders are referred to in negative terms such as "backward," "dirty," and numerous other stereotypes. These examples reflect the failure of the formal and informal education systems to combat stereotyping.

Through incorporating material on outer islanders in the curriculum, the schools will make a thrust toward combating this stereotyping thus insuring that proper understanding of these people and their contributions will be acknowledged. Micronesians, particularly urban residents, should become more sensitive to their more traditional cousins who still retain enduring values that strengthen island societies. In their continuing quest for identity, it is the outer island societies that may well hold the key to self-identity.

Micronesians seeking identity and improving their self-concept should begin with programs in the schools which stress the success story, the hero, the achievements of Micronesians. Research indicates a direct link between a learner's self-concept and his academic achievement. By including a unit on biographies of Micronesians that have achieved stature, a step will have been taken in the direction of increased self-awareness and identity.

The final dimension this presentation focuses upon is Micronesia's contact with numerous religious organizations. Micronesia at this stage in its evolution has a chance to develop a positive and active curriculum in which students can learn of the impact of various religious groups on their cultures. By examining the contributions of these religions, Micronesia has a chance to be pluralistic toward the contributions of each.¹⁶

Strategies

In attempting to foster cultural diversity and inculcate pride in being Micronesian, all viable options through the formal and informal educational system should be considered. In the formal school setting this might entail changes in the instructional program including:

¹⁶Philip Jacobson, "Religion and Public Education: Issues and Concerns," Religious Education (March-April 1973), pp. 207-09.

1. Integration of materials relating to the outer islanders, portraying their accomplishments and achievements in a positive light and reflecting the strengths of traditional institutions and patterns of life worthy of preservation in Micronesia.¹⁷ In the development of such material it is suggested that one pitfall to avoid is the production of uninspired materials. One recommendation would be to have the Trust Territory Department of Education and the University of Hawaii perform the task of revising existing materials or creating new materials that are not biased or limited in scope. Modest funding from the Micronesian or Federal government could make "seed money" available to publishers to create books and other material considered a financial risk without such an incentive.

2. Biographies of Micronesians. Studying the lives of successful islanders may help Micronesians in their identity search by showing they belong in a significant way to their society. Examples of those who have lived successfully in different cultures and have selected the best from each while at the same time remaining islanders/^{are}worthy of consideration. This revolution in Micronesian awareness might begin through identification with contemporary leaders such as Tosiwo Nakayama, a leading advocate of independence; the fiery young orator Oscar Rasa; and successful businessmen such as Raymond Setik and Jose Tenorio. Returns in increased ego strength might also be accomplished by studying the writings of Carl Heine, Micronesia's leading intellectual who has challenged his people to be aware of their past. These and other Micronesians in the arts education, and sciences are worthy of inclusion in the curricula.

¹⁷"In the Isles of the Pacific," National Geographic, Vol. 146 (December 1974). The navigator Hipour from Satawal reflects great credit on the Caroline Islanders' navigation skills. "What has been preserved here is not only the heritage of Micronesians. It is the legacy of uncouth generations of the great captains of all mankind."

3. Micronesian cultural contacts with outside societies through religion. Students should study and have a right to learn of the impact of religion on their cultures. Micronesia has a chance in this area of pioneering and developing a positive curriculum in which religion is recognized and studied in an open manner.¹⁸

Incorporating, formalizing, and institutionalizing the strengths of various cultures through the education system is perhaps a method to be questioned. This may better be handled through informal means. While this paper will not attempt to cover this approach in detail, a closer look at the contributions and roles that museums, such as those in Palau and Yap, and collections found in other districts, might play in fostering cultural pluralism should be examined more closely. The impact of the National Historic Preservation Act, which has been amended to make the Trust Territory eligible for Federal planning funds and preservation grants, also holds out excellent potential for cultural preservation. Already the Federal program lists forty-four Micronesian sites, including pre-historic Chamorro settlements on Saipan, the rock islands of Palau, the site of a 1910 Ponapean rebellion against the Germans, the underwater fleet in Truk, the island home in Yap of "His Majesty O'Keefe," and a 1918 Japanese typhoon memorial in the Marshalls. Also included are World War II battlegrounds such as Bloody Nose Ridge in Pelelieu, Bonzai or Suicide Cliffs on Saipan, as well as the last Japanese command post and the jail where Amelia Earhart is said to have been imprisoned.¹⁹ It is quite possible that the most promising route toward cultural pluralism in the islands can be achieved through subtle, indirect, and less formalized educational institutions such as those briefly touched upon above.

In conclusion, Micronesia has always been a multi-cultural society, and it is time that education awakens to this fact and contributes to the building of a new social order in the island setting.

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¹⁹Diane Maddex, "Micronesia: Wind, Water and History," Historic Preservation (July-September 1975).